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**FIFTEEN ADDITIONAL BAKERSFIELD RESIDENTS CHARGED WITH
FRAUD IN CONNECTION WITH FUNDS INTENDED FOR VICTIMS OF
HURRICANE KATRINA - LOSS APPROACHING \$100,000**

(Brings Number of Individuals Indicted to 30)

FRESNO- United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that additional indictments were returned for fifteen more Bakersfield residents charged with participating in a wire fraud scheme to defraud the American Red Cross and Western Union of funds intended for victims of Hurricane Katrina. The new defendants, are charged as follows:

*A superseding indictment alleging a conspiracy against five previously indicted defendants: ROBERT JOHNSON, 23, NAHSIMA JOHNSON, 27, TONJUA RANDLE, 39, AMINAH RANDLE, 19, and CANDICE BROWN, 20, and three new defendants BARBARA MILES, 46, WYCONDA GOSS, 37, and NICOLE GOSS, 20 was returned by the grand jury today. That indictment also alleges 24 separate counts of wire fraud against those same defendants.

*Two defendants: ANTHONY HILL, 27, and TONISHA SUTHERLAND, 22 were indicted for participating in a scheme to defraud the Red Cross and Western Union of hurricane relief funds.

*Ten separate indictments against ten individual defendants: JASON FRED ORTIZ, 30, DIANE SCOTT CLAY, 45, KELSIE SHAVON ARNOLD, 32, LATOYA MAISHA COOPER, 22, MICHAEL VERNON CARTER, 44, TANYA MARSHALL FRAZIER, 42, CHRISTINA JOSEPHINE CHINO, 19, ELISEO SOTO, 20, WOODROW HAGLER, 53, and NICOLE PUGH, 27.

All of these cases are being investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Bakersfield, California, with the assistance of the Bakersfield Police Department. The cases are being prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office in Fresno, California. The investigation is continuing.

United States Attorney Scott commented that the investigation continues and more arrests are anticipated. "This second wave of indictments confirms that law enforcement authorities are pursuing all those who participated in this scheme to defraud the Red Cross and each will be brought to justice. The Red Cross and the Western Union are to be commended for their ongoing assistance in the investigation and their diligence in preventing further loss."

Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales recently created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force -- chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division -- includes members from the FBI, the Postal Inspection Service, the Executive Office of the United States Attorneys, and the Federal Trade Commission, among others.

According to Assistant United States Attorneys Jonathan B. Conklin and Stanley A. Boone, who are prosecuting the cases, the indictments allege that the defendants participated in a plan or scheme to defraud the Red Cross by submitting or causing others to submit a fraudulent claim through the Red Cross call center located in Bakersfield, California. The indictment explains that the Red Cross, in an attempt to expedite payments to actual victims of Hurricane Katrina, has set up at least two call centers in the United States, the largest of which is located in Bakersfield. According to the indictment, when a person contacts the call center to request assistance, their personal information, including an address within the area affected by the hurricane, is verified by call center employees. Once that information is verified, the caller is provided instructions on how to obtain financial assistance from the Red Cross. Once assistance is approved, a victim is given instructions on how to obtain that assistance at their closest Western Union branch.

As noted in prior announcements, AMINAH RANDLE, ROBERT JOHNSON, ELIZABETH RAY, SHEENA PORTER, DAVID CANDELARIA, MORGAN WINSLOW and MARIETTA SNOWDEN were employed at the Bakersfield Red Cross call center. Newly indicted defendants LATOYA MAISHA COOPER, CHRISTINA JOSEPHINE CHINO and ANTHONY HILL, also worked at the call center. The remaining defendants, TRENT JERMAINE PRESLEE, CANDICE BROWN, TONJUA RANDLE, STANLEY LEWIS, MIKO NOBLES, NASHIMA JOHNSON, HAROLD OATS, and MARISELA GONZALEZ, along with newly indicted defendants JASON FRED ORTIZ, DIANE SCOTT CLAY, KELSIE SHAVON ARNOLD, MICHAEL VERNON CARTER, TANYA MARSHALL FRAZIER, ELISEO SOTO, WOODROW HAGLER, TANISHA SUTHERLAND and NICOLE PUGH, were closely associated with someone who was so employed. They were able to obtain false claim information and, using that information, obtain payment from Western Union.

The charged count for each defendant carries a maximum of 20 years in prison and/or a \$250,000 fine.

The charges are only allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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